

Max, durkheims and marx

Sociology



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Sociology began in the mid nineteenth century in the middle of the European Industrial revolution. In many ways it was in response to that process, as journalists remarked on the exploitation, poverty, oppression and misery of the working class. Some of the most influential sociologists of this period were: Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim's. Karl Marx was born in Trier, in the German Rhineland, in 1818. Although his family was Jewish they converted to Christianity so that his father could pursue his career as a lawyer in the face of Prussia's anti-Jewish laws.

A precocious schoolchild, Marx studied law in Bonn and Berlin, and then wrote a PhD thesis in Philosophy, comparing the views of Democritus and Epicurus. On completion of his doctorate in 1841 Marx hoped for an academic job, but he had already fallen in with too radical a group of thinkers and there was no real prospect. Turning to journalism, Marx rapidly became involved in political and social issues, and soon found himself having to consider communist theory. Of his many early writings, four, in particular, stand out.

'Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction', and 'On The Jewish Question', were both written in 1843 and published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher*. The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, written in Paris 1844, and the 'Theses on Feuerbach' of 1845, remained unpublished in Marx's lifetime. Marx is best known not as a philosopher but as a revolutionary communist, whose works inspired the foundation of many communist regimes in the twentieth century.

It is hard to think of many who have had as much influence in the creation of the modern world. Trained as a philosopher, Marx turned away from

philosophy in his mid-twenties, towards economics and politics. However, in addition to his overtly philosophical early work, his later writings have many points of contact with contemporary philosophical debates, especially in the philosophy of history and the social sciences, and in moral and political philosophy.

Historical materialism — Marx's theory of history — is centered around the idea that forms of society rise and fall as they further and then impede the development of human productive power. Marx sees the historical process as proceeding through a necessary series of modes of production, characterized by class struggle, culminating in communism. Marx's economic analysis of capitalism is based on his version of the labour theory of value, and includes the analysis of capitalist profit as the extraction of surplus value from the exploited proletariat.

The analysis of history and economics come together in Marx's prediction of the inevitable economic breakdown of capitalism, to be replaced by communism. However Marx refused to speculate in detail about the nature of communism, arguing that it would arise through historical processes, and was not the realization of a pre-determined moral ideal. (History of Economic Thought) Karl Emil Maximilian Weber (1864–1920) was born in the Prussian city of Erfurt to a family of notable heritage.

His father, Max Sr. , came from a Westphalian family of merchants and industrialists in the textile business and went on to become a National Liberal parliamentarian of some note in Wilhelmine politics. Weber left home to enroll at the University of Heidelberg in 1882, interrupting his studies after two years to fulfill his year of military service at Strassburg (Strasbourg).

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After his release from the military, Weber was asked by his father to finish his studies at the University of Berlin, where he could live at home.

Weber's significance during his lifetime was considerable among German social scientists, many of whom were his personal friends in Heidelberg or Berlin; but because of the fact that little of his work was published in book form during his lifetime and because most of the journals in which he published had restricted audiences of scholarly specialists, his major impact was felt after his death.

The only exceptions were his formulation of "liberal imperialism" in 1895, his widely discussed thesis on Protestantism and capitalism, and his extensive attack on German foreign and domestic policies during World War I in the pages of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which stimulated liberal sentiment against the government's war aims and led Gen. Erich Ludendorff to view him as a traitor.

In general, it may be said that Weber's greatest merit as a thinker was that he brought the social sciences in Germany, hitherto preoccupied largely with national problems, into direct critical confrontation with the international giants of 19th-century European thought - Marx and Nietzsche - and that through this confrontation he helped create a methodology and a body of literature dealing with the sociology of religion, the sociology of political parties, small group behaviour, and the philosophy of history.

His work continues to stimulate scholarship (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) David Emile Durkheim (April 15, 1858 - November 15, 1917) was a French sociologist. He formally established the academic discipline and,

with Karl Marx and Max Weber, is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science and father of sociology. Durkheim was born in Epinal in Lorraine, coming from a long line of devout French Jews; his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had been rabbis.

He began his education in a rabbinical school, but at an early age, he decided not to follow in his family's rabbinical footsteps, and switched schools. Durkheim himself would lead a completely secular life. Much of his work was dedicated to demonstrating that religious phenomena stemmed from social rather than divine factors. While Durkheim chose not to follow in the family tradition, he did not sever ties with his family or with the Jewish community. Many of his most prominent collaborators and students were Jewish, and some were blood relations.

The societal contributions of Emile Durkheim, founder of modern sociology, include: the idea of the whole being greater and different than the sum of its parts, anomie or normlessness, the concept that religion is equal to society and the sacred and the profane (Collins, 1994). These concepts built a foundation for the field of sociology, and are still being used today by Robert Merton and others. Durkheimian traditions are primarily established as sociological, sometimes Criminological because his principles apply over the whole of society, including its deviant aspects.

Until Durkheim's work, social science was not studied empirically. Durkheim transferred his academic success from the University into his sociological research. This approach alone gained him a respected position in the academic field. Durkheim introduced the theory of Structural/Functionalism

early in his career, and this theory would prove as a foundation for other principles as well.

Anomie, which was developed a few years later, opened the doors for other principles and objectives of sociology, branching even into the recurrent field of criminology. Durkheim subscribed to the macro-sociological ideology, rather than the micro, which was made popular with Weber in symbolic interaction. Durkheim declared that he would leave the individual perspective up to psychologists because his interests lay in the total picture, not the individual parts.

He did not combine the disciplines of anthropology and sociology either, but kept them separated in his research, and he used his scientific method of analysis in both. It was these principles and concepts concerning his study and research of society that earned him the title of "Founder of sociology" because this empirical view was a new perspective for the social sciences. Max Weber opposed the materialist approach of Marx, and stated that the driving factor in social change was the shift in ideas, values and beliefs, arising from the Calvinist or Protestant reformation.

Although he did not invent the term or the approach, Weber's writings contributed to what is now the symbolic interaction perspective. Durkheim also opposed Marx, but in different ways, looking at the notion of a "social fact" suggesting that it referred to statistical rates of any activity, in contrast to the personal activity of an individual. While huge arguments arose in the social sciences between proponents of these three approaches, all three approaches are valid, and that we get a more in depth view of society by using all three at the same time.

Sociology provides an understanding of social issues and patterns of behavior. It helps us identify the social rules that govern our lives. Sociologists study how these rules are created, maintained, changed, passed between generations, and shared between people living in various parts of the world. They also study what happens when these rules are broken. Sociology helps us understand the workings of the social systems within which we live our lives. Sociologists put our interactions with others into a social context.

This means they look not only at behaviors and relationships, but also how the larger world we live in influences these things. Social structures (the way society is organized around the regulated ways people interrelate and organize social life) and social processes (the way society operates) are at work shaping our lives in ways that often go unrecognized. Because of this perspective, sociologists will often say that, as individuals, we are social products.

Even though we recognize their existence, these structures and processes may “ appear to people in the course of daily life as through a mysterious fog” (Lemert 2001, 6). Sociologists strive to bring these things out of the fog, to reveal and study them, and to examine and explain their interrelationships and their impacts on individuals and groups. By describing and explaining these social arrangements and how they shape our lives, sociologists help us to make sense of the world around us and better understand ourselves.

Sociology is not just common sense. Results of sociological research may be unexpected. They often show that things are not always, or even usually,

what they initially seem. “ People who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School, who like the safety of the rules and maxims of what Alfred Schultz . . . has called ‘ the world-taken-for-granted’, should stay away from sociology” (Berger 1963, 24).

This challenge means that sociological findings are often at odds with so-called common sense, or those things that “ everybody knows. ” What we think of as common sense, or something that everybody knows, is actually based on our own experiences and the ideas and stereotypes we hold. This gives us a very limited view of how the larger world actually is. Taking a sociological perspective requires that we look beyond our individual experiences to better understand everyday life (Straus 1994). It allows us to look for the social forces that impact our lives and form those experiences.

Once we have a solid understanding of these forces, we can better address them. For example, a common perception is that suicide is an act of those with individual psychological problems. However, an early sociological study of suicide by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) revealed the importance of social factors, including relationships within church and family, in suicide (Durkheim 1966). Another common perception is that crimes are always committed by some “ criminal element,” identifiable as troublemakers.

In his textbook on social problems, Thomas Sullivan (1973, 296) introduces the chapter on crime by arguing that this is a far too simplistic view of criminality. He notes a study (Zimbardo 1973) in which researchers abandoned a car on a New York City street and watched from a hidden position to see if it was vandalized and by whom. The vandals discovered by

the researchers included a family, a person with a toddler in a stroller, and many people who were well dressed and interacted with people who passed by during their activities.